

The Rukuba and their Neighbours in the Archival Materials an Evaluation of Historical Source - Materials

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ABSTRACT

Until recently, documentary source-materials had remained almost unchallenged, as the only reliable source of historical reconstruction. However, considering (also) the interplay of such obvious variables as culture, time, language, purpose, etc, acting upon the process of generating such source materials, their susceptibility to critical scrutiny becomes irresistible. This paper identifies the archival materials as one of such documentary source materials, and examined the extent to which they can be relevant to the reconstruction of the Rukuba and their neighbours. The idea of "relevance" immediately calls for a comparison between what obtains in the archival materials and what respondents in the field are saying. It therefore became necessary to conduct oral interview among the ethnic groups involved. The findings, matched against some few written documents on the Rukuba and their neighbours showed clearly the inadequacies of archival materials as a source-material for reconstructing the history of these groups. It is then suggested that the use of archival materials must be done in collaboration with oral interview and other written documents.

INTRODUCTION

Following the conquest and subordination of the different polities on the Jos Plateau, the next stage was for the British imperialists to ensure total control of the area by establishing effective, colonial administration in the area. In this direction, the colonial government had to undertake extensive studies in the area, covering many aspects of the people's life, including social organization, economic activities and political systems. The information collected during these studies by anthropologists, ethnographers, and government officials were retrieved and stored at the National Archives.

This paper takes a critical look at these materials, with respect to their reliability in reconstructing the history of Rukuba and their neighbours (the Afizere, Amo Anaguta, Berom, Buji, Ganawuri, Irigwe, and Tariya) of Plateau State in central Nigeria. For the purpose of clarity, the paper is divided into four sections. Immediately after the introduction is a consideration of the problems associated with the reconstruction of the history of pre-literate societies. This is necessary in order to appreciate the problems, which confronted the colonial administration in this endeavour. The third section is a general appraisal of Archival materials. This is followed by an attempt to isolate and evaluate some selected files containing information on the Rukuba and their neighbours.

Reconstructing the History of Pre-Literate Societies

The reconstruction of the history of pre-literate societies poses serious problems, due largely to the absence of written documents, language barrier, and ignorance of the culture of the people about whom information is collected. These were the main difficulties that confronted the colonial administration, in their attempt to commit to writing the various aspects of the life of the Jos Plateau societies. This was especially the case as most of the officials were not professional historians. Most of them had no training in the art of recovering, writing and documenting history, especially of African societies. These deficiencies, to a great extent affected the contents of the documents generated by the colonial administration, and preserved at the National Archives. The absence of written documents coupled with language barrier provided enough room for speculations and inferences (often wrongful). Referring to the above factors, and with reference to the Kuru and Pengana Polities, J.G. Nengel observes that:

The preconceptions of the colonial officials about the subject-peoples and the lack of proper training in the recovery of oral history especially that of chronology led them to assume that the antiquity of most of the polities in the area could not go back beyond the nineteenth century.¹

Indeed, the absence of written records about the different polities on the Jos Plateau was interpreted as complete absence of history; and that what the colonial administration was now doing – the survey of the area – was to rescue these polities from a gradual slip into historical “limbo”. In his editorial comment on the compilation of C.G. Ames, H. Middleton (Resident Plateau Province, 1931 - 32) expressed the fear that:

The inevitable result must be that their origins, histories and traditions will in time become obscured and forgotten, and it was in order to preserve a permanent record of our laboriously acquired knowledge of these people that this survey was compiled.²

Probably the most serious challenge to the reconstruction of the pre-literate societies was language barrier. To solve this problem, the colonial administration employed the services of the Hausa (who claimed to have a fair understanding of the indigenous languages of the Jos Plateau), as interpreters; and in some cases as direct informants. However, the truth was that not only was their knowledge of the indigenous languages very poor, the Hausa interpreters and the colonial officials did not quite comprehend each other’s language. These deficiencies combined to create a confused communication process during the colonial period – a situation which has been aptly demonstrated in the “*Icheokwu: The New Masquerade*”.³ In this connection, H.D. Gunn admits that:

Many difficulties encountered in the literature are apparently due to the fact that investigation has been carried out largely, if not altogether, through medium of Hausa – speaking interpreters which has usually meant that both primary informant and investigator have been using a language with which neither is fully familiar.⁴

Be that as it may, the colonial administration was able to generate a huge body of knowledge about the different ethnic groups, preserved at the National Archives.

The Rukuba and Their Neighbours in the Archival Materials

Archival materials cover a wide range of documents which consist of military expeditions and police patrols, executive council papers, intelligence reports, assessment reports, ordinary files dealing with day-to-day administration, ethnographic and anthropological studies, commissions reports, appointment of chiefs, reorganization reports, establishment of native courts, etc.

The contents of these documents varied with the period during which they were generated, the purpose for which they were intended, and the people with whom the documents were concerned. A general picture of colonial prejudices against the minority groups of the Middle Belt begins to appear on the horizon when the contents of these documents are paired with those of the caliphate. The documents on military expeditions and police patrols were loaded with the activities of the British troops, "stretching from the caliphate to the petty chieftaincies of the Central Nigerian (Middle Belt)".⁵ In these documents, two different sets of attitudes can be identified. While the records of the military activities in the caliphate are full of diplomatic correspondence and treaties,⁶ those on the smaller groups reflect a show of total disrespect and disaffection.⁷ probably what informed this differential documentation was that while the caliphate was susceptible to diplomatic manipulation and military intrigues, the smaller groups defied all known diplomatic and military conventions. With respect to the Jos Plateau groups, D.C. Tambo observes that:

The reports on the expeditions, patrols and tours contain the most detailed accounts available on initial British contact with Plateau groups. Unlike the cases of Bauchi, where control over the central administration to a large degree also meant control over the entire emirate, British officials soon discovered that they could impose their rule on the Plateau only by confronting each group separately.⁸

Following this brief survey of the general characteristics of archival materials, the question becomes even more compelling as to how reliable can these material be in the reconstruction of minority groups such as the Rukuba and their Neighbours? In response to this question, our critical search-light focuses on the following documents: expeditions and police patrols; reorganization (political) reports; tax (economic) assessment reports, ethnographic/anthropological (social) studies. For the purpose of clarity and fairness these documents will be examined one after the other.

Patrol and Expeditions

These were generated during the early stages of British contact with Jos Plateau societies. This stage was marked by military operations and police activities in the area. These documents contain unbroken chain of charges brought against the people and (usually) followed by appeal (to the colonial office) for permission to employ maximum cruelty. Probably the earliest document containing such charges against the Rukuba was

generated in 1901, even before the bombardment of the area. In this document the Rukuba were described as:

The fiercest and the most powerful tribe in the western district...The Resident had been at great pains to get into friendly relations with these people and has succeeded beyond expectations. When a convoy carrying stores to the mining camp, which has lost its way, arrived in the Rukuba country and under the Resident's orders, camped in a village. A quarrel arose and the whole tribe "went on the war path", compelling the Resident who was close by to take reprisals and nullifying the friendly relations he had already achieved. These tribes are difficult to get in touch with, since they kill messengers at sight.⁹

The statement above provokes three strong arguments. Firstly it suggests that the Resident had on an earlier date established friendly relations with the Rukuba (obviously before 1901). Secondly, that by 1901, mining activities had already started on the Jos Plateau. Thirdly, and related to the second, is that the said convoy was on its way to one of the mining camps in Rukuba land. This statement is deficient in two main respects – the location of the mining camp and occasion for the quarrel which rendered it unreliable.

However, the relevance of the statement in contention can be established only on the basis of the following assessment: first, the first exploration sent out from Ibi, for the mining purpose to the Jos Plateau set out in 1902; and by 1903, the expedition arrived Bukuru.¹⁰ Secondly, by 1904 expedition work had started at Naraguta, near Jos.¹¹ The second point corroborates favourably the traditions from Rukuba, with respect to the first appearance of the European in their land thus; "the first white man arrived Kakkek (in Rukuba) after burning down Irigwe houses" in 1904.¹²

Generally speaking, the document generated during this stage of British encounter with the Jos Plateau societies represents the overall criminality of the imperialist action, anchored on untenable charges. Here, almost all the groups were described as "head-hunters", "cannibals", "truculent", etc. It has been recorded in these documents that:

The Hill Angas are cannibals, head-hunters and respecter of no humans. They descend on the plains only when it suites them to take the heads of their more peaceful neighbours. They are almost invariable at war with their neighbours...no doubt; this is a dangerous tribe in the whole of the southern districts.¹³

Indeed, one needs not to wonder at such descriptions. The British encounter with the Hill Angas was a tragedy for the aggressor, probably one of the most challenging tasks to the British troops on the Jos Plateau. They (even) admitted that, "our men disappeared in their numbers without cause"¹⁴ In Rukuba land, the picture was not different from the Hill Angas. As to why the British troops should attack Rukuba, Mr. C.L. Temple explains that:

After Kwooll, the Rukuba district should be visited as these people have been aggressive and truculent and until they are

brought to their senses it is impossible for the Niger Company to take up their claims.¹⁵

Here, the imperialist' aim is clear – to break the people's resistance and render them vulnerable to deprivation and exploitation.

When a researcher reads a document such as the one examined above, how does he manage it and present it as history to rational audience? Certainly, to reproduce colonial views as history will amount to stereotyping and unfortunate. The description "aggressive" and "truculent" are relative and cannot be adopted in an unsimilar circumstance for the reconstruction of objective history of Rukuba and their neighbours. Faced with an external aggression, the people must of necessity attempt some form of resistance, regardless of their apparent knowledge of the futility of their action. To describe the action of people trying to defend themselves as barbaric is most unreasonable and undeserving.

Usually, the British troops were the "destroyer arm" of the imperialist penetration; and they played this role with maximum cruelty. Latter attempts to justify their action resulted in the documentation of falsehood. When, in 1907, a commission of enquiry was set up at Bukuru on the order of the High Commission at Zungeru, to look into the circumstances leading to the death of the chiefs of Unit and Bomo (Rukuba villages) on May 21, 1906, Capt. Wilkins, who led the escort on that fateful day, presented the following argument:

The Sarki of Bomo gave us much trouble and bit soldiers and other prisoners and died on the 13th (of May, 1906). The chief of Unit attacked us with one of our machets, which he snatched from one of the soldier's belt. When we put the chief of Unit down he got hold of a matchet and cut of one soldier and tried to bite us. He laid down and died about six o'clock in the evening.¹⁶

Considering the inconsistencies and gaps in the above statement a serious scholar and historian will justifiably consign this to the trash-can as rubbish. This is outright fallacy. These gaps and inconsistencies cannot be excused as error of recording; they are deliberate attempts to conceal the horror of the circumstance. To represent these two men of virtue in the archival materials as men of questionable sanity, after being dealt with in the most barbaric manner is to commit one of the unforgivable crimes in historical documentation.

Tax Assessment and Reorganization Reports

These documents were generated during the second stage of colonial occupation of the area in question. The tax assessment exercise preceded that of the reorganization, and much of the information later. In addition to being mostly inaccurate, these documents reveal the perception of colonial administration toward the Rukuba and their neighbours. In his Reassessment Report on the Rukuba Mr. E.W. Thompstone (Assistant District Officer – A.D.O.) reported that;

Previous to the advent of our administration, the Rukuba were a constant source of terror to their neighbours for ever

raiding towns and farms, they seem to have been fierce and unruly people knowing no laws and fearing no one. They used to raid the Irigwe on the Miango plains, the Berom between Jos and Bukuru, and were at constant war with the Jarawa. They were cannibals and used to eat their enemies.¹⁷

In this kind of reporting and recording, the colonial officials sought to achieve certain covert aims: to justify their presence, to boost their credibility, and present to their sponsors a picture of extra-ordinariness in living among the “uncivilized” and “cannibalistic” “barbarians”. All these descriptions are relative and cannot be accepted totally by any serious and objective researcher.

In the process of this kind of recording, the colonial officers fell into contradictions with one another, thereby making the inconsistencies in the archival materials very serious. Mr. Hoskyns – Abrahall (A.D.O), in his report, in 1935 described the Rukuba as “vigorous, intelligent, and attractive.”¹⁸ This obviously contradicts the earlier report by Thompstone, which presented the people as “uneducated, uncouth, primitive, and irresponsible, and are more backward even than any of their neighbours.”¹⁹ In a similar fashion, Mr. E.H.M. Counsell (A.D.O), in his reorganization report on the Rukuba and their neighbours of Pengana (i.e The Amo, Buji and Jere) in 1936, stripped them off of what was implied in the Thompstone’s description of their Rukuba Neighbours, in 1914. In his report, Counsell described the Pengana groups as “raw pagans and low grade people.”²⁰ This Suggests that in 1914, the Amo, Buji and Jere were more intelligent than their Rukuba neighbours; and in 1935 they dropped down to a position of “low grade people”, thus putting them at par with the “unintelligent” Rukuba! Any attempt by any researcher to reconcile these contradictory statements will obviously be a waste of time. Similarly any of these descriptions reproduced in reference to the Rukuba and their neighbours amounts to stereotyping.

The tax assessment exercise was for the purpose of economic exploitation. Thus, emphasis was on market prices for basic commodities, land tenure, crop yields, and household composition. This was to determine tax rate and identify crops of economic importance, which could be improved for export to British industries. David Tambo observed, “The data contained in such reports could be very unrepresentative when collected during times of famine and economic depression, or when organized to support a particular policy.”²¹ This shows clearly that the economic history of the Rukuba and their neighbours was not spared in this kind of documentation. It would be hazardous to depend too much on the archival materials in the reconstruction of the pre-colonial (and even colonial) economy of the different polities in the area.

Ethnographic Studies

There is also a close relationship between the archival material generated by colonial officials and the works of European anthropologists such as; C.K Meek: *The Northern Tribes of Nigeria*, 1925; C.G. Ames: *Gazetteer of Plateau Province*, 1934; H.D. Gunn: *Ethnographic Survey of Africa: People of the Plateau Area of Northern Nigeria*, 1953. Both the colonial officials and the European anthropologist attempted to document the cultural history of the people and in the process found themselves reproducing each other’s

work. Although the works of the anthropologists were based on field research, they relied heavily on government files and correspondence with other government officials. In addition to outright condemnation of the people as "uncivilized", much of their literature tend to be inaccurate and contain glaring misrepresentations of concepts, especially the concept of cultural evolution (which) was particularly dominant at the time and Plateau groups invariably were placed very low on the ladder.²² In the same vein, these anthropologists fell victim to contradictions. H.D. Gunn's misrepresentation of Counsell's position on the Rukuba is a good example. In his reorganization report of 1934, Counsell had described the Rukuba as uncivilized, cannibals and head-hunters. But Gunn, in his ethnographic survey makes reference to counsell the other way:

According to E.H.M. Counsell, whose investigation preceded the reorganization of 1936, the Rukuba are a vigorous people of fine physique, and impressive as regards the number of active old men...and others take an active interest in their own affairs, have a clear and intelligent idea of what they want, and no fear of speaking out.²³

As stated earlier, the above position is that of Abrahall in 1935 and not Counsell's. Several such instances of contradictions, and which later European anthropologists lifted abound. Earlier on during the process of consolidation of colonial administration in Rukuba land, the area was fragmented. One part was included in Amo District of Plateau Province, another in Lere District of Zaria Province, and the larger part remained in Bukuru District of Plateau Province. During the Resident assessment of 1914 by S.E.M. Stobart (A.D.O.) he reported that "the larger portion of the tribe resides in Zaria Province".²⁴ In 1934, Counsell, in his reorganization of the area, reported, "the number of population in Zaria Province is small".²⁵

This particular contradiction is significant and requires some attention. It is obvious that the dismemberment of some sections of Rukuba by the British imperialists was aimed at fragmenting the people thus weakening their might to muster any future cohesive resistance. From the records of the British military campaigns, it is clear that the Rukuba had maintained effective resistance far longer than any of their immediate neighbours. While the Irigwe, Amo, Jere, etc. were pacified between 1904 and 1906 it took the British six years (1904 - 1909) of fierce fighting, until in 1909 when the chiefs of Ujjah and Uhit were eventually arrested and sent to prison in Kaduna.²⁶

An important aspect of the colonial reorganization, which has provoked serious questions in recent times regarding the reliability of archival materials generally, was the boundary delimitation exercise. Between 1905 and 1918 the colonial government embarked on the delineation of provincial boundaries for the entire Northern Nigeria. Probably it was at this point that the colonial administration committed the worst treachery against the different polities on the Jos Plateau, documented same, and preserved these at the National Archives, Kaduna. Today, several panels of enquiry, Administrative Commissions, etc, have tried to unite this colonial chain, now being manipulated by the emirate at will, with little or no success. In this delineation exercise, Bauchi Province was created; and "on account of the misleading information provided at Bauchi Palace, claiming that previously

most of the Plateau polities had formed part of the emirate government, all the polities were lumped together with the Bauchi Province.¹²⁷

The fact that the colonial administration attempted a good job by interviewing elders and documenting the oral accounts is undisputable. However, the stubborn question which stares us in the face is whether the information so documented was a product of direct communication between the colonial officials and the indigenous societies. Certainly, the answer is no as stated earlier, in-between the two was the Hausa interpreters who like the colonial administration had an interest. This too is undisputable, because “all creators of documents have some interest in what they write... The interests shape the kind of questions posed and the answers they recorded.”²⁸ This fact is further re-enforced by the presence of Hausanized names of places and persons in the archival files, and other early works of European anthropologists on the peoples of the Jos Plateau. A few examples are shown on the table below.²⁹

Ethnic Group	Corrupt/Hausanized Version
Amap	Amo/Amawa
Anaboze	Buji/Bujawa
Jere	Jerawa
Jar	Jarawa
Narabunu	Ribina/Ribinawa
Berom	Burumawa/Sho-Sho

Source: A.A. Kudu, 2006.

It would appear that the Berom have been the most unfortunate victim of this covert manipulation in the colonial documentation. The Hausa interpreters adopted some funny logic to interpret the name “Berom” in order to finally arrive at a completely distorted tradition of their origin. In his ethnographic survey... much of which derived from archival records, Gunn explains that:

Other names applied to the Berom are “*Kibo*” or “*Kibbo*” and “*Kibyen*”, said to mean “naked people: there is evidence that the various forms of the name were first applied to the western section of the Berom by Hausa and Zangon Katab, Zaria Emirate... The names are of Hausa origin since there is a Hausa word “*Kibiya*” (arrow).³⁰

Pushing this irrational logic farther, Gunn asserts that “There is some evidence that neither the greeting nor the name is as it were the exclusive property of the Berom”.³¹ Referring to the greeting “*Shou*”, which the Hausa interpreters added another “*Shou*” to form “*shou-shou*” is another name of the Berom, Gunn claims that “*shou-shou*” is common Hausa simpleton, and obviously deriving his authority from his Hausa interpreters, also claims that “*shou-shou* appears to have been anciently the generic name for the pagan inhabitants of the Fali, roughly the region fanning southward between the outer reaches of Kano and Borno Mandara”³²

There are serious problems in the argument above. Gunn claims that “*Kibo*” or “*Kibbo*” and “*Kibyem*” meant “naked people”. Whether these three words are English or Hausa, Gunn does not say. However, if these words are of Hausa origin, and their root – word is “*Kibiya*” (arrow), as he subsequently claims, then in what way (s) are “arrow” and “naked people” interchangeable? Probably what sounds more acceptable to the Berom at the moment is the position of C.C. Jacobs, whose studies on the people remain unsurpassed in recent times. Jacobs observes, “The meaning of the name Berom is not clear. It has been suggested that it is the plural form of the name of the mythical ancestor of the Berom.”³³ Jacobs’ position validates an earlier suggestion by J.G. Davis, that “the ethnic group derived its name from the mythical founder who was called “*Wo Rom*” (from whom came the name “Berom”) “*Bi*”, being a plural prefix.”³⁴ Similarly, the word “*shou*” is purely of Berom origin and it is simply greeting. From the example of “*nyem miri*” (give me water, in Igbo) which has come to be the generally accepted name of the Igbo in the Northern Nigeria, one needs not probe this “*shou shou*” question any further.

Driving the history of a people along such a network of complicated bends and groves is bad craft, which renders history vulnerable to scissors-and-paste reconstruction. On this note it should be admitted that archival materials, though represent the first stage of historical documentation of the Jos Plateau societies, they also mark the first and long-lasting damage done to the history of the area.

On chronology, most of the records at the National Archives describe the peopling of the Jos Plateau as a consequence of the battles of the Sokoto Jihad. This was obviously the position their Hausa interpreters, who were trying to anchor the beginning of these societies on the Sokoto Jihad. Reacting to this kind of chronology, Prof. M.Y. Mangwvat, tracing the formation, of cultural groups on the Jos Plateau, identifies four phases.

c.200 B.C. to 1000 A.D. which was the so-called pre-historic.

The second, c.1100-1700 A.D. was occasioned by the development in the Kanem-Borno region particularly following the establishment of the second Kanuri Empire, which occasioned the emigration of groups of people who refused to be incorporated into the new Kanem Polity to the Jos Plateau. The third phase, c.1600-1800 was associated with the Jukun-Kwararafa activities. The fourth phase, 1800-1907 A.D. was related to the Fulani herders and Hausa traders, which culminated in the Sokoto Jihad.³⁵

After all, Soper observed that most of the groups on the Jos Plateau arrived in the area by the last 500 years (i.e by the last half of the 15th century).³⁶ This agrees with Mangwvat’s second phase in the peopling of the Jos Plateau. Probably Mr. Counsell and Mr. Synge (both Assistant District Officers), who are credited with extensive studies on the Rukuba and their neighbours could also be associated with the worst distortion of the history of these groups. Tracing the history of the Rukuba from Gba (Ugbak), Mr. Synge claims that it was one group which, on arrival at Pengana split into Buji, Jere, Amo, and Rukaba.³⁷ In his contribution to this error (or falsehood?) Counsell claims that the name

Rukuba means "people of the rocks"³⁸ this again is wrong interpretation. In an earlier study, it was observed that:

The people commonly known as "Rukuba", call themselves "Ba-chengh"...meaning those who moved or went away. Unlike the word "Ba-chengh" the word "Rukuba" has virtually no meaning to the people, and the source of the name is unknown.³⁹

As stated earlier, this position was maintained by later European anthropologists (and even some of the earlier African writers) who wrote on the Jos Plateau polities. Gunn (in another instance) claims that "the name Rukuba", according to Counsell, an Administrative Officer who has worked among the Rukuba suggests that this is a Hausa version of their Berom name,⁴⁰ admitting that "throughout this study, the spellings of names is that officially recognized by the administration. No attempt is made to represent them phonetically."⁴¹ Thus, the blunder arose more from the uncritical acceptance by the colonial officials of information from the Hausa than just the use made of them as interpreters and informants. That the name Rukuba is a Hausa version of their Birom name, suggests that the two names are interchangeable! This could not have been accepted and documented even by the greatest enemy of these groups.

Obviously, if the practice of uncritical acceptance and documentation of information by the colonial officers is adopted in using the materials they left behind, the societies, so represented will remain static, and their history irrelevant.

Using Archival Materials

The purpose of this rather lengthy critic of archival materials is not to undermine their relevance in the reconstruction of the history of the Rukuba and their neighbours. Indeed, for people who, before the advent of colonialism, had no written history (especially the Rukuba and their neighbours), archival materials represented the earliest form of documented knowledge generated about these groups. However, this paper stresses that archival materials are raw data and must be carefully processed against other sources (especially oral accounts from the field). History only makes meaning when the contents correspond with the aim, time, and the prevailing circumstance. Thus materials generated during a particular period cannot have the same interpretation over time. Hence:

Our sense of direction and our interpretation of the past are subject to constant modification and evolution as we proceed...the historian interpretation of the past, his selection of the significant and the relevant evasive with the progressive emergence of new goals.⁴²

What was documented by the colonial officials as truth of history "yesterday" cannot survive to constitute the truth of history "today." The purpose for which that was written, and the circumstance under which it was written "yesterday" are of very little or no relevance at all to our changing social conditions "today".

The truth of history is truths of time and for a time. They serve the particular need of a particular age...History will

not stay written. Every age demands a history written to its own stand point with reference to its own social conditions – and thus comprehensible to the men who live in it.⁴³

So, when A.Y. Aliyu and his European collaborator, J.H. Morrison enter into the treacherous intercourse for the sole object of perpetuating the joint conspiracy of colonial officials and their Hausa interpreters/informants against the Rukuba neighbours of Pengana, one wonders to what generation of historians they both belong. Referring to the effects of the Sokoto Jihad on the Jos Plateau, both Aliyu and Morrison lifted a huge chunk of colonial fallacy (or ignorance?) that “prior to the jihad, the whole area (especially Pengana and Kauru) was uninhabited.”⁴⁴

While Aliyu for instance concludes that as a result of the Jihad, the Amo, Buji, Jere, Sanga, Lemoro Duguza and Ribina left Kondon Kaya area for their present localities in about 1817 – 1818, Morrison, dealing with the same polities dates the abandonment of Pengana hill settlement where they had lived after leaving Kondon Kaya to about 1818 – 1820.⁴⁵

Nengel observes that when subjected to thorough critical scrutiny, there is no strong evidence in these works to support their conclusion. “Thus, Aliyu’s seemingly uncritical acceptance of and dependence on the colonial accounts is rather puzzling.”⁴⁶ This negative and false presentation of their past has affected the general understanding of the dynamic nature of the Middle Belt societies. Indeed, prejudice coupled with strong regional inclination obscure the critical faculty, and preclude critical investigation. The result is that falsehoods are accepted and transmitted. This is bad history or no history at all.

The position of this paper is clear, there is the need for systematic examination of materials alongside those who generated them in order to determine their relative credibility; and especially to establish principles on which this determination should be carried out. This point is re-enforced by the professional advice of the great historian, E.H.L. Fisher that “to write history or even to read it is to be endlessly engaged in a process of selection...many facts are called, but few are chosen, on implicit and rational criteria of factual significance.”⁴⁷ This further buttresses the position of B. Croce, which requires that “the main work of the historian is not to record but to evaluate; for if he does not evaluate how can he know what is worth reading?”⁴⁸ Hence, archival materials must be evaluated before serving them as history.

The fact that Rukuba, Jere, Amo and Buji trace their origin from Ugbak does not suggest that at one time these groups were linguistically and culturally homogeneous, and at another time they split into separate cultural groups, whose languages belong to different linguistic groups. Crozier and Blench have included the Rukuba language under the South-Western sub-group of the Plateau group, where Rukuba is found in cluster 1, together with many other groups including the Ninzam and Mada.⁴⁹

This (linguistic evidence) is one in the combination which Carr refers to as “auxiliary sciences of history” – archeology, epigraphy, numismatics chronology, and so forth⁵⁰ – which were obviously not taken into consideration in the process of generating the archival

materials. Thus, using archival materials must necessarily require the partnership of these auxiliary sciences of history. It is obvious that serious instances of contradictions abound in the archival materials. A careful study of these materials is required in order to identify such cases. If for instance, Thompstone describes the Rukuba as uneducated, unruly, uncouth, and so on; and another District officer (Abrahall) describes them as vigorous, intelligent and very attractive, it is the responsibility of the historian, trained in the art of reconciling such fatal contradictions, to skillfully examine these contradictions with close attention to the periods at which these contradicting facts were recorded, the prevailing social condition of the people vis-à-vis their relationship with the imperialists, in order to determine the relevance of these two, opposing positions to what is currently being written.

In the same vein, concerning the jihadist incursions into the Jos Plateau from Zazzau, and its effects on the Rukuba and their neighbours, Counsell reports that "the attack on the Amo and Rukuba failed. As the Piti fled into Kugmen (in Rukuba) a combined forces of Kugmen and Kakkek (also in Rukuba) came out on their horses and drove the jihadist away with heavy casualties."⁵¹ In the same document, ignorant of the territory of the Rukuba, Counsell refers to Kugmen, which shares a common boundary with Piti in the Lere vassal state of Zazzau as the Zaria Rukuba, and proceeds to contradict himself that "the Rukuba are an off-shoot from the Plateau Rukubas whose town was captured, burned by the Emir Yero (c.1892). They were afterward defeated by the Piti."⁵² Here, one begins to wonder which Piti sought refuge among the Rukuba of Kugmen, and which ones defeated the Rukuba (supposedly) of that same Kugmen.

These contradictions, coupled with several other instances of misrepresentation of the Rukuba and their neighbours call for a systematic corroboration of other sources (especially the oral traditions, as against the old-fashioned view of its inferiority). If objectively employed, oral traditions serves as an arbiter to reconcile such internal contradictions, as have been identified in documents such as archival materials, and a judge to convict or vindicate written documents generally. In fact, documents are no longer revered as "Ark of covenant in the Temple of facts",⁵³ but like all sources of history, must humbly submit to the committee of sources for screening and subsequent verdict. This readily brings to mind Professor Abdullahi Smith, a strong advocate of this historical methodology, as indispensable scale on which to weigh all other sources of history. The accomplished scholar and great historian, Professor Smith argues very strongly for the use of oral traditions "to check the accuracy of what reads in written documents."⁵⁴ He however suggests that:

All oral traditions is to be raised to the level of scientific enquiry. No tradition must be recorded without attaching to the record all valuable information necessary for the assessment of the traditions value. We must have biographical information about the recorder himself and about the person on whom it was recorded.⁵⁵

This format answers many questions regarding the source of the information (name of informant); the status of information so obtained (whether at age that age the informant was an active participant, passive observer, or he got the information second-hand, in which

case he was not yet born); etc. The questionnaires are carefully designed (subject-by-subject) to correspond with the content of the archival material under scrutiny.

Probably the most fatal blow on what may be considered by the colonial apologists as the “integrity” of archival material comes from the great historian and accomplished scholar, the Emeritus Professor of history, Ade Ajayi, having recounted some of the successes achieved by the Historical Society of Nigeria, in decolonizing the colonial historiography, the great historian makes reference to a statement an earlier paper thus:

I once trod on peoples toes when I said that faction (sic) entitled “Just Before Dawn” produced by literary writer was more insightful as history than the 12 volumes of compilation of archival materials without adequate historical analysis and evaluation by the National commission.⁵⁶

This clearly shows that wholesale import of such materials without the due process of scrutiny only helps to perpetuate the presence of colonial foot-print on the contemporary history of such smaller groups as the Rukuba and their neighbours. This awareness, to a great extent has been responsible for the recent trends in Africa historiography, which now places emphasis on the use of oral traditions.

CONCLUSION

This paper does not seek to undermine the credibility of archival material in the reconstruction of Nigerian history. The emphasis here has been on the Rukuba and their neighbours, who, prior to the advent of colonialism had no written history. In addition they did not understand either the Hausa language or the English language. Hence, the colonial officials had to seek assistance of the Hausa (who claimed to have a fair understanding of the indigenous languages) as interpreters; and in some cases as direct informants. Equally so, the interpreters’ knowledge of English language was very inadequate and vis-à-vis the colonial officials. This combined confused communication process during the colonial period characterized the contents of archival materials. Based on the strength of the foregoing observations, this paper strongly supports the use of oral traditions to cross-check the factual position of the archival materials before they can be used for any meaningful historical reconstruction.

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